

Foster Parents

Changing Lives One Child at a Time

October 2006



“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”

— John Whitehead

To you who send living messages in your daily care for children, we say thank you.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Conference: A Successful Event

More than 500 people attended the 24th annual Foster Parents and Caregivers Conference in Spokane Sept. 17-19 with the theme “Plant A Dream, Grow A Child.” The conference is believed to be the largest held in the state to celebrate and honor the work of foster parents and caregivers. The conference was held in Spokane for the first time since 1989. A local committee of CA staff, foster parents from the Spokane foster parent association, and volunteers organized by Laurie Palmquist contributed enormously to the success of the conference, building on the theme of “Plant A Dream, Grow A Child” by creating a potting shed that served as the registration area and a garden theme in the main ballroom.

Participants were able to select from nearly 40 workshops in subject areas from managing the children’s behavior, advocating for foster children’s special needs, mental health needs of children and psychotropic medications to modeling coping skills and connections for caregiver support. Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Cheryl Stephani helped kick off the conference, using the conference theme of “Plant a Dream, Grow A Child” by saying “You have to be ready to roll up your sleeves, sweat a little, get dirt under your fingernails and be persistent to make sure your flowers can grow and produce the big beautiful blooms and foliage they are capable of offering.”

King County Juvenile Court Judge Patricia Clark focused on “Protecting Our Children” in her keynote speech on Sunday. She talked about the availability and kinds of services children must have in order to have a chance at a productive life. Judge Clark also chairs the Juvenile Disproportionality Committee.

Jeff Kincaid, who grew up with dozens of foster children in his home, entertained the caregivers and also served as master of ceremonies for the conference. Jeff currently works as a foster home licensor for the Division of Licensed Resources in Spokane.

Hannah and Abby Smith, the adopted children of Jeanine and Scott Smith of Shelton did a moving rendition of “I Believe I Can Fly” as two dozen children handed out carnations to the crowd at the opening session.

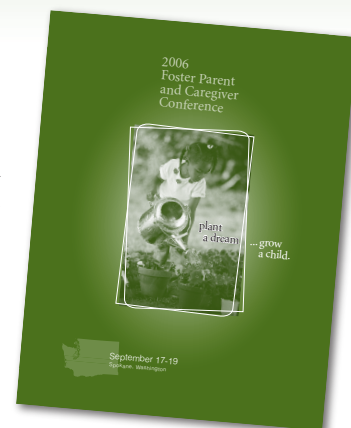
Singer/Songwriter Peter Alsop entertained and educated at a Sunday night concert in adjacent Riverfront Park, where a salmon barbecue also was held. Dr. Alsop’s keynote address on Monday afternoon focused on “Making Safe Places”.

Other highlights included two panels of young people sharing their experiences in foster care. Members of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board shared how caregivers can help in the youth’s transition into adulthood. Members of the Spokane judicial community tried out their acting abilities in a Harry Potter-based skit about the dependency process.

For the second year in a row, regions demonstrated their physical prowess by competing with each other in pie baking, egg throwing, a three-legged race. The home team of Region 1, based in Spokane, won the contest and the trophy that goes with it.

One way to keep people at a conference is to offer the opportunity to win a theme basket only if present. Foster parents and caregivers won large themed baskets put together by Children’s Administration employees, Casey Family Programs and others. Baskets included themes such as “Family Entertainment Night” and “Self-Care.” The grand prize was a hope chest donated by the Community Aid Coalition, a group of prisoners at the Monroe Correctional Facility through Families for Kids.

“The conference was deemed to be a success by the attendees,” said Diana Gray, who co-chaired the committee with Barb Bofinger.



Parent-Child Visits: The Caregiver Role

This conference workshop provided caregivers the opportunity to hear first hand about Children's Administration's new visit policy and practice guide for social workers. About 35 caregivers attended this session focusing on the caregiver role in visits. Caregiver's responsibilities contained in the policy and practice guide were discussed. These responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the child is available for visits
- Notifying the social worker of any changes or concerns regarding participation and any needs
- Committing to support and implementing the requirements of the visit plan

This workshop was very interactive and participants shared many good ideas. One foster family shared their positive experiences in conducting parent-child visits in their home, which gave them the opportunity to mentor the parents. Hints for helping children cope at the end of visits as well as between visits were shared among participants.

Ideas:

- Have the parents do an audio or video tape of themselves reading a story to the child to be used in between visits
- Have the child telephone the parent
- Have pictures of the child and parent together for the child to have
- Have a favorite or special toy from the parent available for the child.

Important Numbers

Important numbers to know when you take care of children in foster care or are thinking about doing so:

Statewide information about becoming a foster or adoptive parent: *Why Foster* statewide telephone line at 1-800-760-5340 or whyfoster@seattleymca.org Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Statewide information about receiving foster parent support: *Families for Kids*: 1-888-794-1794 or www.familiesforkids.org Monday – Friday, 9:00 – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message. Receive a return call by the next business day.

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: *Foster Care Resource Network*, 1-253-677-8122. Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

General foster parent information for the state of Washington/FPAWS: *Foster Parent Association of Washington State*, 1-800-391-CARE (2273) or www.fpaws.org. FPAWS is seeking new members and supporting foster parents in many ways, including referrals to local associations.

Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect: *Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team* (FIRST) 1-253-219-6782, Monday – Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

CA Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis Line and general support on licensing and case management questions not abuse or neglect: *Caregiver Support/Crisis Line*: 1-800-301-1868. Weeknights from 4:30 p.m. – 8:00 a.m./weekends and holidays, 24 hours per day.

Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE or www.parenttrust.org. The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington State. Last year, the Family Help Line received over 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website and Foster Parent Training Website

For information about Foster Parenting: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>

For information about Foster Parent Training: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp>

Join the 400 people who have subscribed to the List Serve:(r) <http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1>

Washington State Mental Health Crisis Line: Crisis intervention is provided for mental health issues. Go to <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/> to find the nearest telephone number for the crisis line.